

ASPECTS REGARDING THE THEORY OF THE INDIVIDUAL'S BASIC VALUES

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ABSTRACT

The concept of "value" has a long research tradition in the social sciences, as a field of interest also to philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, specialists in management and marketing. M. Rokeach (1973, cited in Tania Ogay, 2004) considers values as the central concept of the social sciences, because all issues that take into consideration these sciences, one time or another, act either as dependent or either as independent variables. Our article aims in the beginning, to define the concepts of "values" and "the hierarchy of values." In the second part we concentrate our work in validating, through the field research that we have done as a part of our doctoral thesis, the basic assumptions of the theory of the individual values, built by S.H. Schwartz (2006) using data from over seventy countries.

KEYWORDS: *compatibility relationships between values; core value oppositional relationships between values; pan-cultural consensus.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is no society that could not respect values, in the context of the permanent danger of anomie as the sociologist E. Durkheim (1859-1917) highlighted. Anomie describes confusion, lack of social norms in a society. And the society that does not set clear behavioral limits for its members is no longer able to integrate individuals living in uncertainty caused by the lack of values that represent important landmarks (Ogay, 2004). In fact, one of the most important consequences of anomie is the loss of social cohesion and a weakening of collective consciousness and, as E. Durkheim stressed out (1987, cited in Ogay, 2004), the behavior of individuals translates into an increase both in the suicide rate and also in delinquency.

Therefore, values are vital to society and individuals, acting as abstract and stable principles surpassing particular contexts and serving as landmarks in orientation, justification and evaluation of actions and behaviors of individuals. Values are analyzed from several points of view in the social sciences research, and these points of view are prone to investigate values following their particular paradigmatic norms, rather than in an interdisciplinary approach.

A number of authors Berry, Poortinga, Segall & Dasen (2002, cited in Ogay, 2004) show that values have a long history as a subject in psychology, anthropology and sociology, but not such a long one in the intercultural approach, focused on the comparative analysis of value systems developed over time in different cultural contexts.

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2. THE CONCEPT OF VALUES. THE HIERARCHY OF BASIC VALUES

The epistemology of the concept of value crossed the entire history of sociology starting from Durkheim, Parsons, to Weber & Simmel etc. Having a polysemantic character, the concept of value is still a subject of debate among theorists (Assogba, 2004b). Thus, on the one hand, values are assigned a subjective dimension due to the fact that they inspire actions that can be considered rational in relation to the aims and the goals they pursue. On the other hand, values raise the issue of universalism and the particular, the pluralism and the conflict.

In sociology, the concept of value can be defined as "a way of being or acting that a person or a community recognize as ideal and which makes existences or behaviors more desirable and expected" (Rocher, 1992, quoted in Assogba, 2004b).

Values are transmitted, learned, internalized and shared by individuals or a social group or a society thanks to socialization.

Ogay (2004) in her initiative to analyze the different approaches to conceptualize the notion of "value", and with the help of the vast literature she studied, she concentrated her attention on the contribution of Schwartz (2002), who, after his own epistemological study covering scientific production carried out for over four decades, **reached a consensus regarding the nature of values**, summarized as follows:

- **Values are beliefs**, cognitive structures closely related to affective states;
- **Values refer to desirable goals**, acting as abstract principles that serve as orientation points for individual actions; at a societal level they support the political choices, directing behavior towards achieving these goals;
- **Values transcend specific actions and situations**, which distinguishes them from smaller concepts such as norms and attitudes that relate to actions, objects or specific situations;
- **Values use standards or criteria** for selecting and evaluating behaviors;
- **Values form a system and are hierarchized**; cultures and individuals develop priority systems of values;
- **The relative importance of a value guides the action**: each behavior or attitude involves many values and each value contributes, according to its relevance to the situation and the importance that it has for the actor.

The synthesis carried out by S.H. Schwartz raises a number of questions because of the unanswered issues regarding important topics of interest to professionals and practitioners. **A first problem** is linked to **the so-called lack of interest in addressing the specific issue of the origin of values**, emphasizing only on the concerns of various authors mentioned in the epistemological related to the content and structure of values. As Ogay (2004) highlights, the origin of values is analyzed by Rokeach (1973), who stresses out that the source of values of an individual can be located in culture, society and its institutions, as well as in his personality. Segall, Dasen, Berry and Poortinga (1999, cited in Ogay, 2004), starting from the theoretical cross-cultural model of Berry, explain the transmission of values from society (generated by socio-political and environmental contexts) to the individual (psychological characteristics) by means of an enculturation process (involuntary assimilation of forms of culture through training and education) and of socialization (learning more or less imposed by socialization agents such as parents, teachers, priests, etc.).

A second issue that arises regarding the epistemological synthesis created by Schwartz (2002) is related to the fact that in the proposed definition of value the "level" where the concept is placed and measured is not clearly stated: Society?, Individual? Both society and individual?. Smith and Schwartz (1997, cited in Ogay, 2004) state that it is possible to approach values both at an individual and societal level. But other authors (Segall et al., 1999) links the concept of "values" to one level – the societal one - considering that by building its own system of values a society becomes a culture. They mention that values form reference frameworks to which individuals are

tied to a certain extent, society's values being reflected in the beliefs and motivations of individuals and their decisions to act.

Schwartz and Bardi (2001, cited in Schwartz, 2006) have carried out a detailed analysis regarding the hierarchy of values. This has led to the observation of **a pan-cultural consensus in the hierarchy of values, explained by Schwartz (2006) by three exigencies of human nature which are essential to the functioning of society:**

- a. the need to practice and preserve the cooperation and support between the members of a basic group; the crucial point of transmission of values is to make a commitment regarding the development of positive relationships, identifying to a group and being faithful to its members;
- b. the need to give individuals the motivation to devote time, physical and intellectual effort necessary for the success of a certain task;
- c. the social utility of giving legitimacy to satisfying the personal needs and wants, to the extent that it does not oppose the group's objectives.

In the context of this pan-cultural consensus of basic values, even when using different tools to measure them, it can be observed that the order of importance of the ten basic values is very similar from a representative sample to another. The research conducted under the direction of Schwartz (2006) **confirmed the following hierarchy of the basic values of individuals:**

- **goodwill. The first place that goodwill occupies** is explained by the great importance that is generated by the central character of positive social relations and cooperation within the family, which offers the perfect context of acquisition and learning of values; this basic value is transformed throughout life of each individual at all ages;
- **universalism occupies the second position**, helps establishing positive social relationships at school, work, in the social group etc.;
- **the third position is held by autonomy**. It develops creativity, innovation and encourages confronting challenges that the group can encounter in times of crisis; autonomy helps strengthen the first two core values;
- **security, fourth position, and compliance fifth position**, open the way to harmonizing social relations, contributing to the avoidance of conflicts and compliancy to group rules;
- **both hedonism – sixth position, and stimulation - ninth position**, are generated by the urge to achieve the legitimate needs of innate pleasure;
- **success, seventh position**, can be seen in the light of its positive side, when the basic value leads individuals to invest in certain tasks of the group, making equally legitimate self-assertion, as long as it contributes to the welfare of the group; from a negative perspective, this core value encourages some efforts to obtain social approval which, in turn can lead to a destabilization of harmonious social relations within the group;
- **tradition - eighth position**, can enhance solidarity within the group, which represents a guarantee for the functioning and survival of the group;
- **power - tenth position**, has a significance as a core value because it can give individuals the motivation to work for the interests of the group; it justifies also the social hierarchy in all societies.

3. METHODOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF FIELD RESEARCH ON A SAMPLE OF STUDENTS

In the context of our doctoral thesis focused on a new vision, that is the ecclesiastical management, we approached the Romanian Orthodox Church from the perspective of its role as a trainer / transmitter of core values among the young population, in this case a sample of 402 graduate and undergraduate students, from all the faculties of the Valahia University of Targoviste (economics, humanities, sciences, legal sciences and other majors; The field research emphasized on

investigating the formation of values in the case of young people and their relationship with the Romanian Orthodox Church).

The purpose of this article was not to review methodological aspects and the overall results of the research. We concentrated our attention on two items from the questionnaire we used for gathering information (the first question is: "Please indicate the values which have shaped your identity, those who you believe to be a priority for young people and those who are frequently missing"), more specifically on the question which followed identifying the ranking values that "have left an impression" on the identity of the student (values that "were learned"), values which students consider as being "a priority" and also values that "most young people are missing." This question included 20 items, representing a list of values determined a priori. Please note that this was a selection of values, based on documentation obtained from the literature (Schwartz, 2006; IFOP study France 2012; international survey conducted by the Foundation for Political Innovation, France, 2008).

4. CORE VALUES AND KEY TRAINERS OF STUDENTS FROM UNIVERSITY "VALAHIA" IN TARGOVISTE

The 20 items were grouped into ten core values that constitute the architecture of the theory of individual's core values of Schwartz (2006). Table 1 presents the basic hierarchy of values, after processing the results of the survey that we conducted between 8th to the 11th of April.

Table 1. Hierarchy of core values for the sample of students from Valahia University of Targoviste

Core values	Transmitted, learned values	Values that have to be transmitted with priority	Values that are missing the most in the young generation
1. Goodwill	38.9	34.4	29.1
2. Universalism	20.9	23.3	24.3
3. Autonomy	11.0	8.1	8.3
4. Security	4.2	5.7	7.7
5. Compliance	7.4	7.2	8.2
6. Hedonism	2.2	2.7	2.7
7. Success	4.3	4.4	3.3
8. Tradition	4.7	5.4	6.2
9. Stimulation	2.1	3.1	3.6
10. Power	4.3	5.7	6.6

Source: The authors' research

Data from the table highlight **some relevant aspects that help explain the basic motivations covering attitudes and behaviors:**

- The pan-cultural referential regarding the proposed hierarchy of core values of S.H. Schwartz is confirmed;
- core values occupying **the first five positions** (in the same order as found in the theory of S.H. Schwartz) are **associated with the following items:**
 - **Goodwill:** responsibility, true friendship, sincerity, honesty, capacity of listening;
 - **Universalism:** trust, generosity, conscientious work, social justice;
 - **Autonomy:** freedom to choose their own purposes (trust), curiosity;
 - **Security:** respect for authority (national security), resistance (good health);
 - **Compliance:** fidelity, self-discipline.

Regarding the core values of students, it is important to know "Who are the main trainers of values that give meaning to an individual's life" (Table 2).

Table 2. Hierarchy of the main trainers of core values of students in the investigated sample

Main trainers	Percentage from the total of answers
1. Family	39.2
2. School	24.7
3. Friends	12.7
4. Religion/church	10.1
5. Sports	6.3
6. Workplace	3.6
7. Social life	2.1
8. Another scenario	0.3
9. No answer	0.9

Source: The authors' research

This case also confirms the hierarchy of the first core values trainers: family (39.2%), school (24.7) and friends (12.7%).

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion we emphasize a few aspects, as follows:

- You cannot conceive the idea of a society without the practices of transmitting values. In fact, we consider this process as an essential part of education, taking place in all areas of society, not only in schools.
- Values are vital both to society and individuals, acting as abstract and stable principles, transcending particular contexts and serving as landmarks in orientation, justification and evaluation of actions and behaviors.

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